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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
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INFO RUEHTG/AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA IMMEDIATE 0001
WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHEHWSR/WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000035

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SUBJECT: Zelaya and Fernandez Arrive in DR

REF: A) TEGUCIGALPA 65 AND PREVIOUS; B) SANTO DOMINGO 23
C) SANTO DOMINGO 25; D) SANTO DOMINGO 150

11. SUMMARY: Former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, accompanied by President Leonel Fernandez, arrived in the Dominican Republic (DR) the evening of 1/27/10, following the latter's attendance at the inauguration of Zelaya's constitutional successor, Porfirio Lobo. Both Zelaya and Fernandez criticized the failed efforts of the Organization of American States and the international community to bring about Zelaya's restoration to office and called for revisions to the Inter-American Democratic Charter that would strengthen sanctions against future "golpistas". END SUMMARY.

12. Dominican authorities received Zelaya at the San Isidro Air Force Base with full honors as an ex-President and as a "distinguished guest" of the Dominican nation, with the entire Cabinet present. Zelaya arrived with his wife Xiomara Castro, his two children, and his assistant Rasel Tome.

13. At the press conference following their arrival, Fernandez and Zelaya each separately took the OAS and the international community to task for their failure to restore a democratically elected President to office in Honduras. Both called for a strengthening of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, primarily through undefined greater sanctions, so as to avoid future interruptions of constitutional order and reverse any that do occur. Zelaya praised Fernandez effusively, thanking him for the "rescue of the dignity of Latin America" and the Dominican people for their commitment to Honduran unity. Fernandez, in turn, saluted Zelaya as a "symbol of democracy" for Latin America.

14. COMMENT: Fernandez has been out front on the Honduran crisis since the 6/28/09 coup, condemning that action, demanding Zelaya's restoration, expressing frustration at OAS and UN inability to affect Zelaya's return, suggesting enhanced sanctions (including Honduras' suspension from CAFTA-DR), and then, following Lobo's election, working to achieve Zelaya's dignified departure from Honduras, Lobo's agreement to comply with the San Jose-Tegucigalpa accord, and a normalization of Honduras' status within the international community (Refs B-C). While the Dominican President has taken some shots domestically from the left for welcoming Lobo to Santo Domingo last week and then attending his inauguration, the safe and honorable arrival of Zelaya in the DR, along with the

Honduran ex-President's fulsome praise, seem to have quieted such criticism. There is some concern that Fernandez' Honduran activism led Venezuela's Chavez to pull the plug on purchasing 49 percent of REFIDOMSA, the DR's state-owned oil refinery, for USD 131 million (Ref D), but this has been countered by recognition that it probably is not in the country's interest for a foreign state to have such a large stake in a strategic industry, as well as by the realization that there is interest from domestic investors in buying into REFIDOMSA on similar terms to those negotiated with Chavez. END COMMENT.
Lambert